

PCGzine

ISSUE 68 | JULY 2012

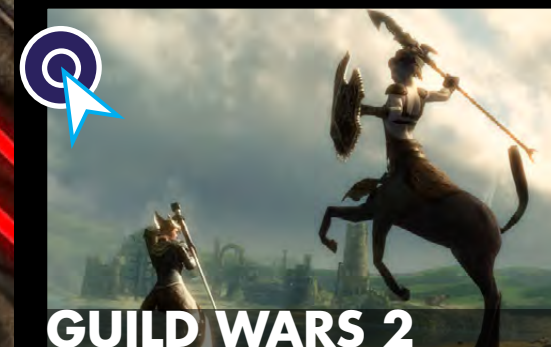
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SPEC OPS: THE LINE



**NEED FOR SPEED:
MOST WANTED**



GUILD WARS 2



**CALL OF DUTY:
BLACK OPS 2**

HANDS-ON PREVIEW

SHOOTMANIA

PCGZine

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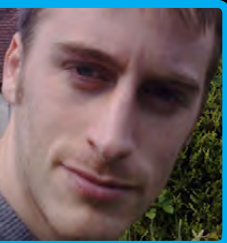


gamerzines

Runes of Magic



WELCOME TO PCGZine



People give military shooters a lot of flak. Ever year we tolerate plenty of developers aping *Call of Duty* with the aim to recreate its success – most of them

completely missing the point of why *Modern Warfare* rightly took the world by storm. We don't want studios to copy and paste existing formulas, we want them to tread new ground, taking our medium into uncharted territory. Yager absolutely understands this which is why *Spec Ops: The Line* was 'the' big surprise for us. Sure the gameplay is familiar, but the story is different to anything we've sampled before. We give it the full review treatment this month with another unashamedly dark experience, the return of a certain Max Payne.

Both of these experiences show that Shooterville is alive and well, thanks to developers relying on the worth of a good plot and great characters rather than gameplay alone. Here's to you great storytellers. The more of you that flock to our blossoming medium the better our worlds will be.

Enjoy the issue.

Andy Griffiths, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

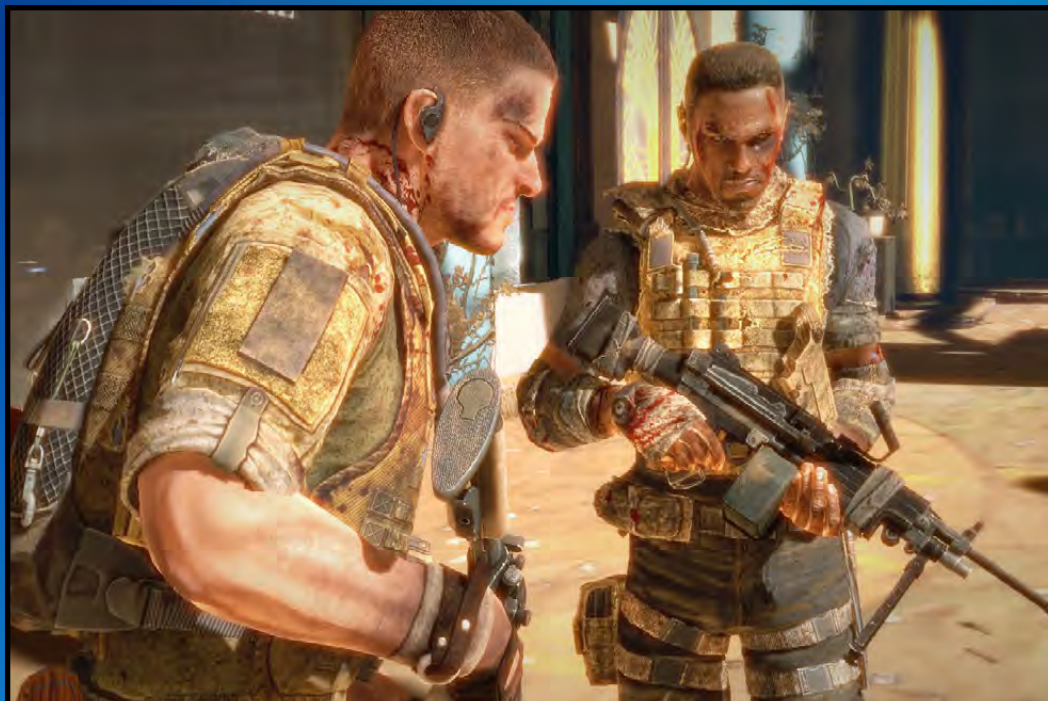


SBK
GENERATIONS



GUILD WARS 2

Don't miss! *This month's highlights!*



SPEC OPS: THE LINE



SHOOTMANIA
STORM

QUICK FINDER

Splinter Cell	Need for Speed:
Blacklist	Most Wanted
Call of Duty: Black Ops 2	Guild Wars 2
Counter-Strike:	Spec Ops:
Global Offensive	The Line
Max Payne 3	SBK
Quantum	Generations
Conundrum	Krater

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HI DEF VIDEO



FIRST LOOK

SPLINTER CELL:
BLACKLISTPUB: UBISOFT
DEV: IN-HOUSE
ETA: SPRING 2013*Bring your own goggles*

We have a soft spot for reliable ol' Sam Fisher, but even we can admit that the hero – voiced by Michael Ironside – has gone through the ringer a few too many times. He needs a fresh start, a new beginning if you will, and *Blacklist* is exactly that. Sure the story follows on from *Conviction*, with Mr Fisher spearheading a new counter-terrorist operation unimaginatively called 'Fourth Echelon', but tonally at least, *Blacklist* feels like a reboot, with a new voice actor assuming the role of America's finest special-ops agent.

The mark and execute gameplay pioneered in the previous game returns, as does a separate co-op mode in addition to the campaign, a dedicated competitive mode pitting spies against mercs and, best of all, Sam's iconic green tri-goggles! It's as if all our wishes for this franchise have been granted. As long as the gameplay veers towards stealth rather than all-out action, then this could be exactly the kind of *Splinter Cell* experience we've been yearning for. ■

THIS
MONTH'S
HOTTEST
TRAILER!Please enter the day,
month and year in the Date
of Birth fields below:

DD MM YYYY

Play Trailer



ALLIANCE

HI DEF VIDEO



FIRST LOOK

NEED FOR SPEED:
MOST WANTEDPUB: EA
DEV: CRITERION
ETA: NOVEMBER*An all-new paradise to conquer*

At E3 we had every meaningful appendage crossed hoping for a new *Burnout* to emerge from the ether of hyperbole. Unfortunately, EA and Criterion ultimately left us disappointed, but it seems *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* might actually be the next best thing.

The next chapter in this long-running arcade racing series is set in a new open-world format which isn't arbitrary walled off from the player. Instead every aspect of this urban sprawl is available to explore from the off, with a new and improved version of Autolog to encourage competitive spirits to flourish online. Everything from fastest lap-time to the amount of air-time achieved from a specific jump is logged, tallied and compared in online leaderboards in a style akin to *Burnout Paradise*.

It's weird to see *Most Wanted* sprawled on a *Need for Speed* game which doesn't have a central storyline or silly characters (hello Sergeant Cross!) but Criterion are a developer well-known for doing their own thing and we can't wait to see how this *Most Wanted* expands on its 2005 counterpart. ■

ROLL
OVER
FOR
INFO!



HI DEF VIDEO



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS 2

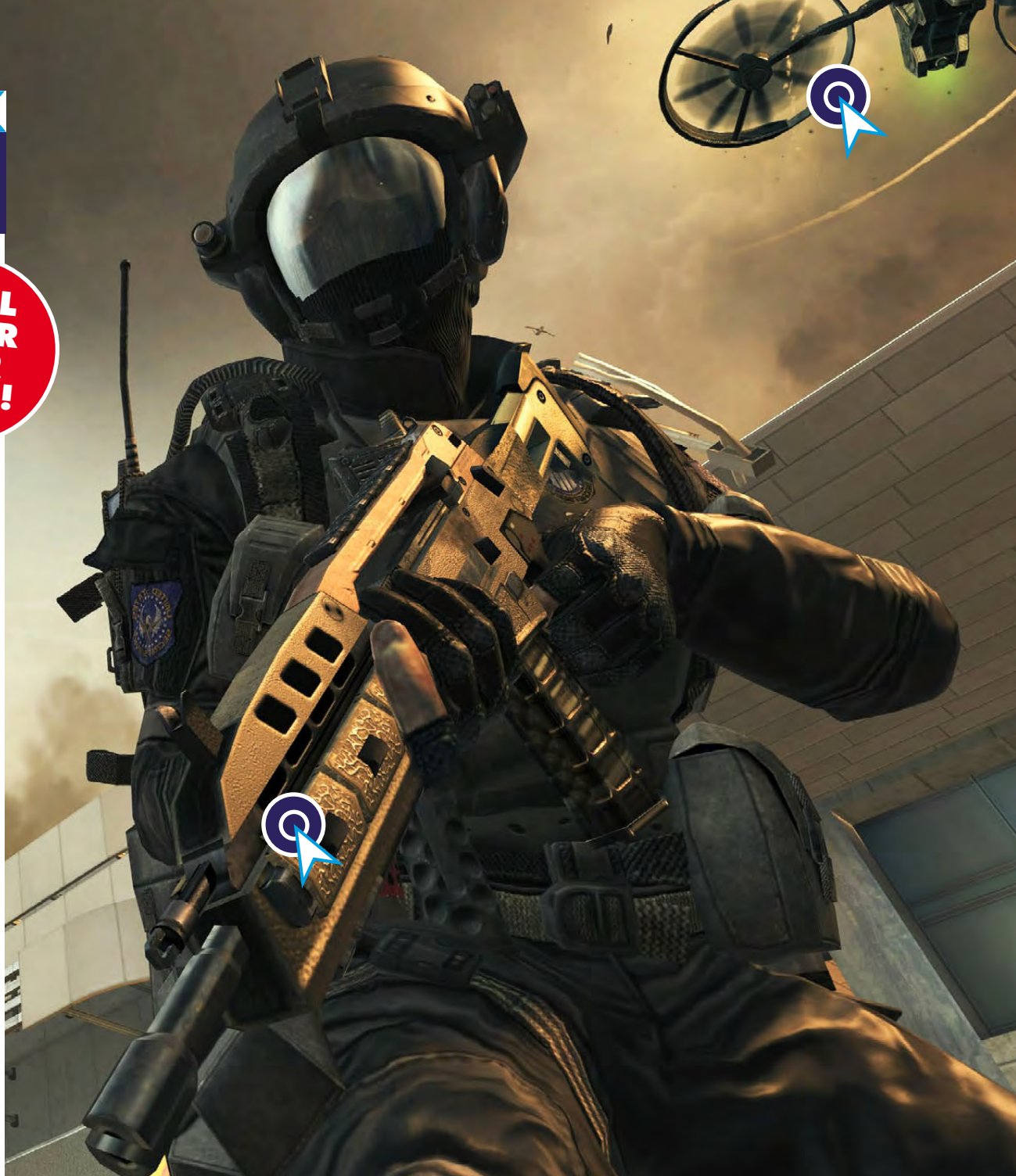
FIRST LOOK

PUB: ACTIVISION
DEV: TREYARCH
ETA: 13TH NOVEMBER*The tools of the future, today*

What do you do if you've already plundered the past and present for inspiration for your future blockbuster. Wait a second. Future... blockbuster... of course!

Set the next *Call of Duty* in the near future! Why the heck didn't we think of that? It's so simple. We could borrow some drones from *Ghost Recon*, a terrorism plot centred around a foreign threat taking control of AI routines from *Die Hard 4* and bingo, you've got the next iteration of what's sure to be the best-selling game of all time.

As PC gamers, it's rather easy to underestimate *Call of Duty*, but *Black Ops* was certainly the better of the bunch and the sequel's campaign builds on its successful formula with a new dual-narrative, once again feeding off one another. The first stars returning protagonist Alex Mason through the Seventies and Eighties, while the other features his son fighting in a future conflict between USA and China in 2025. The latter portion of the campaign actually sounds radically different with sections centred around controlling multiple soldiers simultaneously, and curiously enough different endings depending on how players perform. A co-op Zombie mode and a litany of competitive modes also return, this time with support for dedicated servers. Maybe this one really is different. ■

ROLL
OVER
FOR
INFO!

THE SECRET WORLD

“ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT
MMORPGS OF OUR TIME”



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Play Trailer

HI DEF VIDEO



PREVIEW

INCOMING

COMING TO A PS3 NEAR YOU SOON!

WATCH DOGS

PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: UBISOFT MONTREAL

2013

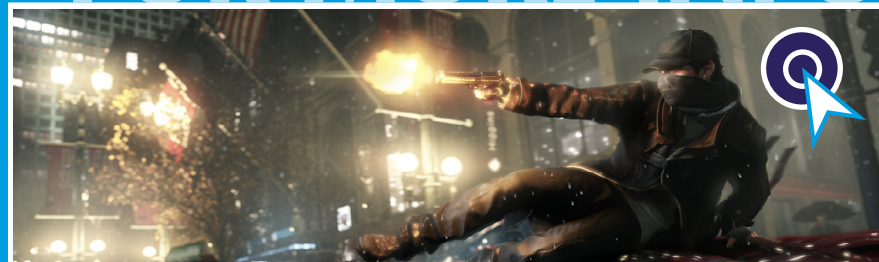


Continuing the E3 hype train we have *Watch Dogs*, an open-world cyber-warfare game which takes the best of *Deus Ex* and *Assassin's Creed* and mashes it together in a futuristic version of Chicago. This was one of the few surprises of E3 which didn't resort to live-action gimmicks, and instead

focused on showing gamers raw gameplay. This raw gameplay of which we speak centred around the game's protagonist, Aiden Pearce, hacking into mobile phones, surveillance cameras and city-wide infrastructures, and only by using a handy mobile device. Very intriguing, and definitely one to watch.



CLICK EACH GAME FOR MORE INFO



LEGENDS OF PEGASUS

HI DEF VIDEO



THE NEWBIE PLAYS GUILD WARS 2

PUB: NCSOFT
DEV: ARENANET
LAST GAME: GUILD WARS:
EYE OF THE NORTH
ETA: 28TH AUGUST

Usually we don't tend to write about MMORPGs, as we've got our sister magazine *MMOZine* for that. However sometimes there's a release that demands our attention. A game so significant that it would be criminal for us not to let every PC owner in the land know that something incredible is on the horizon.

Guild Wars 2 fits that bill, not only because it's arguably the most anticipated game of the year, but also because it boasts all the MMO functionality you'd expect without the pressures of a monthly subscription fee. Perhaps it's the kind of experience which could get non-MMO fans involved? We decided to put that theory to the test by putting the sequel in the hands of a complete and utter moron. An individual who knows nothing about MMOs and instead spends all his time playing first-person shooters.

For the benefits of anonymity (ours not his) we're going to

call him 'Steve'. These are his insights from a recent Beta event, so take it away fella...

Fresh Beginnings

MMOs aren't for me; I've never tried one, don't know anyone who has and don't really understand what the term 'Massively Multiplayer' actually means, so by *PCGZine's* logic that makes me ideal candidate to form a critique of *Guild Wars 2*.

Being chucked into a five-hour test session with what is apparently 'the most anticipated game of the year' may sound good to you, but for me it's bloody torture! At least that's what I thought. I thought *Guild Wars 2* was going to be all Elves and Pixies, but in actual fact this fantasy universe has balls!

Dumped head first into the character select screen, I was greeted with the sort of fantasy nonsense I'd come to expect: tech-savvy Dwarf, plant lady, and freakishly tall humanoid and regularly-sized humanoid. Selecting the Nord race was an easy choice really, as I'd had a pair of Thor





pyjamas when I was little. All that wasn't really the exciting bit though, as what floated my boat was the promise of guns. As well as all that Ranger, Necromancer, Elementalist magic nonsense, there's the option to choose an Engineer class, which I snapped up with vigour. According to the handy class description, this role boasted the ability to be armed with various projectile weaponry and could cast out various bullet-firing, fire-spewing, grenade-tossing, health-replenishing turrets!

Before I had a chance to ponder over whether I wanted to burn enemies or help out fellow players burn enemies, I needed to go through the rest of the character creation process.

There's lots of customisation options available, ranging from choosing your character's default colours to answering multiple choice questions to determine the nature of the patchwork cut-scene which introduced me to the world. Answering questions like 'What do you crave, personal glory or to find

your dead sister's remains?' You know, that kind of thing. The process for my adventurer is also shown in full in the video link above.

Even though the questions guide you down a very specific paths, I was actually starting to get excited about playing this game. And that excitement was sustained with a brilliant fantasy score, and a skilfully crafted introductory cinematic which made answering the questions seem

"I was actually starting to get excited about playing this game"

more than worthwhile.

The groovy cinematic is clearly designed to empower the player and make their adventures seem like they matter in the wider context of a world filled with hundreds of other similarly important heroes, yet even on a multiplayer naysayer like myself it actually worked. Kind of.

Playing as a Nord, much was made of my character's need to prove himself to his Warrior brethren in 'The Great Hunt'. The starter city of Hoelbreck certainly consisted of the kind of atmosphere Thor would've fitted in perfectly here, with lots of drinking, dancing and fighting.

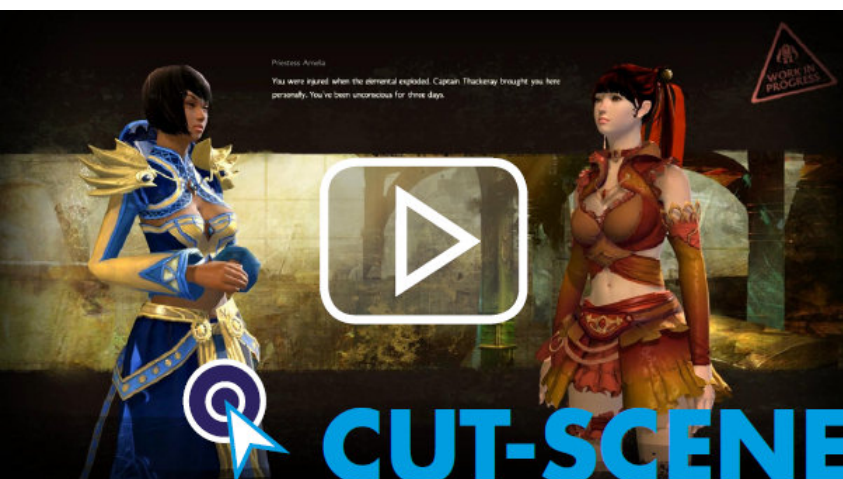
ARE WE IN ASGARD?

This idyllic mountain environment seemed much more alive than I was expecting and more like a regular RPG, with wildlife milling around and lots of events embedded around the world, including one involving me and a merry band of players slaying a mountain giant worm. By following pop-ups I successfully conquered the challenges of the hot-bar and hit up a scout to show me the big landmarks of the surrounding area.

Even the basic tutorial missions were pretty fun, even though they basically consisted of testing my familiarity of the AWSO keys. I will say that the pop-ups explaining the obtuse menu and inventory design were helpful though. I didn't mind jumping through these hoops as even walking around proved enjoyable enough. In how many other



There are lots of features 'Steve' didn't talk about, including World vs World skirmishes for up to 2,000 players.



Lion's Arch has a distinctly more naval vibe than we remember, but of course Steve won't know that.



games can you say that? Sure the client chugged a bit on my relatively modern PC, but artistically at least, *Guild Wars 2* looks absolutely gorgeous.

Combat was surprisingly impactful as well, with my red and blue-clad agent of death able to place down gun turrets, cast out lightning and throw out his shield causing lots of damage. Honestly though, the

"So this is what all the fuss is about with MMORPGs"

amount of numbers flying onto the screen didn't really mean much to me, but I grasped the idea that the higher the better.

Most of the main story missions transported me away from the overworld into instanced areas away from others, with the Nord story detailing the battle between the Captain Planet-hating 'Sons of Svanir', and the tree-hugging Nords. Frankly this was more of the fantasy nonsense I can't stand to be apart of, even if the

game kept chucking parables at me that described a spirit world beyond our own.

Thankfully what really saved the day for me were the public quests. Basically the way they work is that whenever you venture into any area, there are multiple multi-stage events to take part in and their difficulty scales in accordance with how many players are involved. One of these said events centred around protecting a farmer's crop from bandits, which in turn led to me and a band of 20 other random adventurers escorting AI farmers to the heart of this bandit's hideout, and from there we faced a giant boss while destroying turrets and equipment along the way. These events sound mundane, but when you're with a dozen or so other players, teaming up against a 'Big Bad', you can't help but enjoy yourself.

The battles feel like an emergent event. So much so that you feel compelled to stick with people which 20 minutes ago you'd never met before. These events repeat regularly, and at least once I resampled one I'd taken part in before, but at least there

seems to be lots scattered around the game world. Seeing all the different classes mix together and their abilities wash over the screen was a revelation to me and genuinely got my heart pumping furiously. So this is what all the fuss is about with MMORPGs. I finally see it; an experience shared is an experience doubled or even quadrupled.

As much as it pains me to say it, my time with *Guild Wars 2* was a pleasurable one. It took me a while to get to grips with the mechanics and the inevitable lag-effect associated with combat, but I can certainly say that MMOs aren't the cancerous growth on the shoulder of gaming that I thought they were. Will I invest in a copy when it comes out? Maybe I will. Who knows, I might even start reading *MMOZine*, too.

Thanks for that editorial 'Steve', and we're very pleased to here that you've conquered your online fears. *Guild Wars 2* will be released this August and we'll give it the proper hands-on treatment next month. ■



HI DEF VIDEO

ME



COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE HANDS-ON

PUB: VALVE
DEV: HIDDEN PATH
ENTERTAINMENT, VALVE
LAST GAME: PORTAL 2
ETA: 21ST AUGUST

TWITTER



@azureverie

I love how CS:GO costs less than CS:S. Then again from what I've played in the CBT I'm actually liking CS:S a lot more.



@el_chan

Why waste money on CoD maps when CS:GO comes out in a few months time...



@slasher

ESL has removed CS 1.6 as a main title for the 7th season of IEM. The only game that's been featured all six seasons.



@xsixgeneralhans

@slasher its a good thing. If there was still 1.6, then CS:GO would not be accepted. This is only way this franchise can go on competitively.

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

Different source, same flavour

Every trend passes in time, no matter how much we fight against it. As avid fans and players of *Counter-Strike* over the years, there have been multiple iterations of the multiplayer phenomenon which we haven't been sold on straight away, be it *CS 1.6*, the forced implementation of Steam or the ever-controversial *CS: Source*. Across the videogame landscape there isn't a franchise that's more fractious than *Counter-Strike*, and while the previous iterative jump was largely a visual one, *Global Offensive* takes the tactical twitch-based shooter down a more focused five-on-five road.

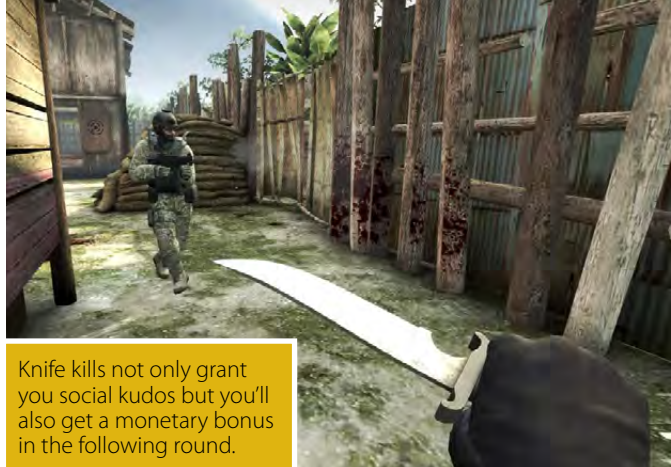
Seeing as we've grown up with 10 vs 10, 20 vs 20, and even 32 vs 32 matches, it's hard to go back down to a much smaller size, but Valve aren't seeking to replace your *Counter-Strike* flavour of choice, instead they're wisely trying to open it up to a wider audience by offering a much more welcoming experience. The hit-boxes have shrunk even closer to the character models' forms, the

weapons for the most part are the same, but functionally everything has been given a spruce up, from the weapon purchase menu to matchmaking. There's even a new medal-based reward infrastructure which offers pointless yet shiny things to recognise good team-play.

The premise is still the same, with matches pitting terrorists against counter-terrorists. The latter has to eliminate the former either by bullets, preventing a bomb from exploding or freeing captured hostages. In addition to traditional matches on *CS_Office*, *DE_Dust* and other classics, there's also *Arms Race* (a kill-for-weapon mode which functions a lot like *Gun Game*), and *Demolition* (which still consists of one team stopping another from planting explosives), but matches take place on much smaller maps, which leads to rounds rarely lasting more than 90 seconds.

Couple those modes with some new rifles and pistols, as well as a new one-hit kill taser – pretty redundant when the AWP rifle does the same thing from a much longer range – and you have a slightly modified game





CS_Office is good, but we'd kill for an updated version of CS_747, or better yet AS_OilRig.

Knife kills not only grant you social kudos but you'll also get a monetary bonus in the following round.



which feels different enough from its forebears. There are also two new grenades, a decoy variety which simulates gunfire and the Molotov Cocktail which, unsurprisingly, can set groups of enemies on fire and coats the floor in liquid flame, allowing players to stop a rush attempt for a few precious seconds.

"It's easy to dismiss this iteration of our beloved franchise as CS: Lite"

When playing CS: GO it's hard not to get the impression that its primary focus has been the console crowd. The menu interface is chunky, the ability to join servers based on IP or return to your favourite is buried deeper than the ubiquitous quick match option, and the overall pace of competitive play seems quicker, thanks to some map layouts being changed to offer a fairer challenge to both teams. These alterations to the core formula will inevitably lead to complaints, but Valve has plenty

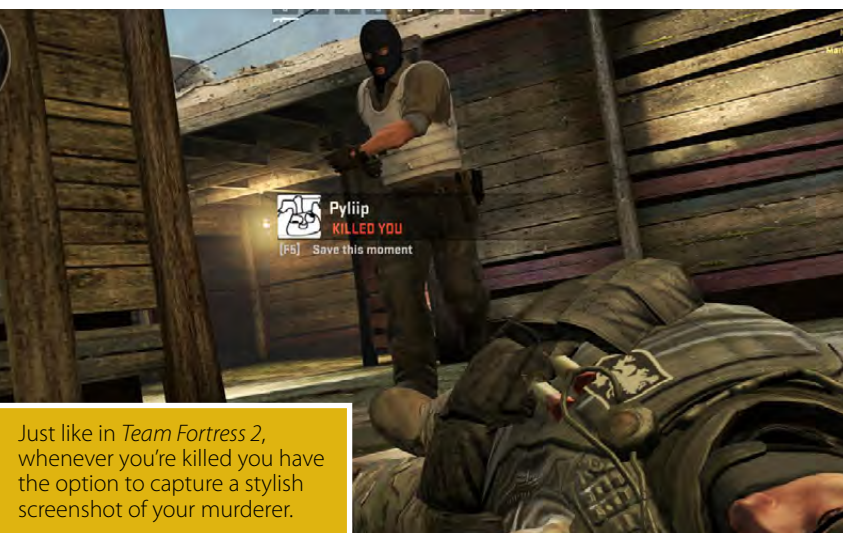
of time to remedy them as this semi-sequel is still in closed Beta. Where they falter, we suspect the community will pitch in to recreate classic maps authentically and offer up the litany of plug-ins necessary to make this vanilla version of *Counter-Strike* hold-up to its predecessor.

Custom skins, betting mechanics, sounds ripped from *Quake* – all of these things will be added in good time. Besides, CS: GO is more likely to capture a new audience in 2012 than CS: Source, and for a community that has been on a downward spiral for a few years, that's a good thing.

We loved *Counter-Strike* ever since 1.4 blew our collective minds back in college, and due to this prejudice against the new, it's easy to dismiss CS: GO as 'CS: Lite'. However, that doesn't detract from the fact that even at this stage, *Global Offensive* is a very good multiplayer experience. Besides, it isn't like Valve are taking the previous games off digital shelves, so there isn't any need to complain. Sure it isn't quite the same series that we remember, but as inevitable as change is, sometimes it can be a good thing. ■



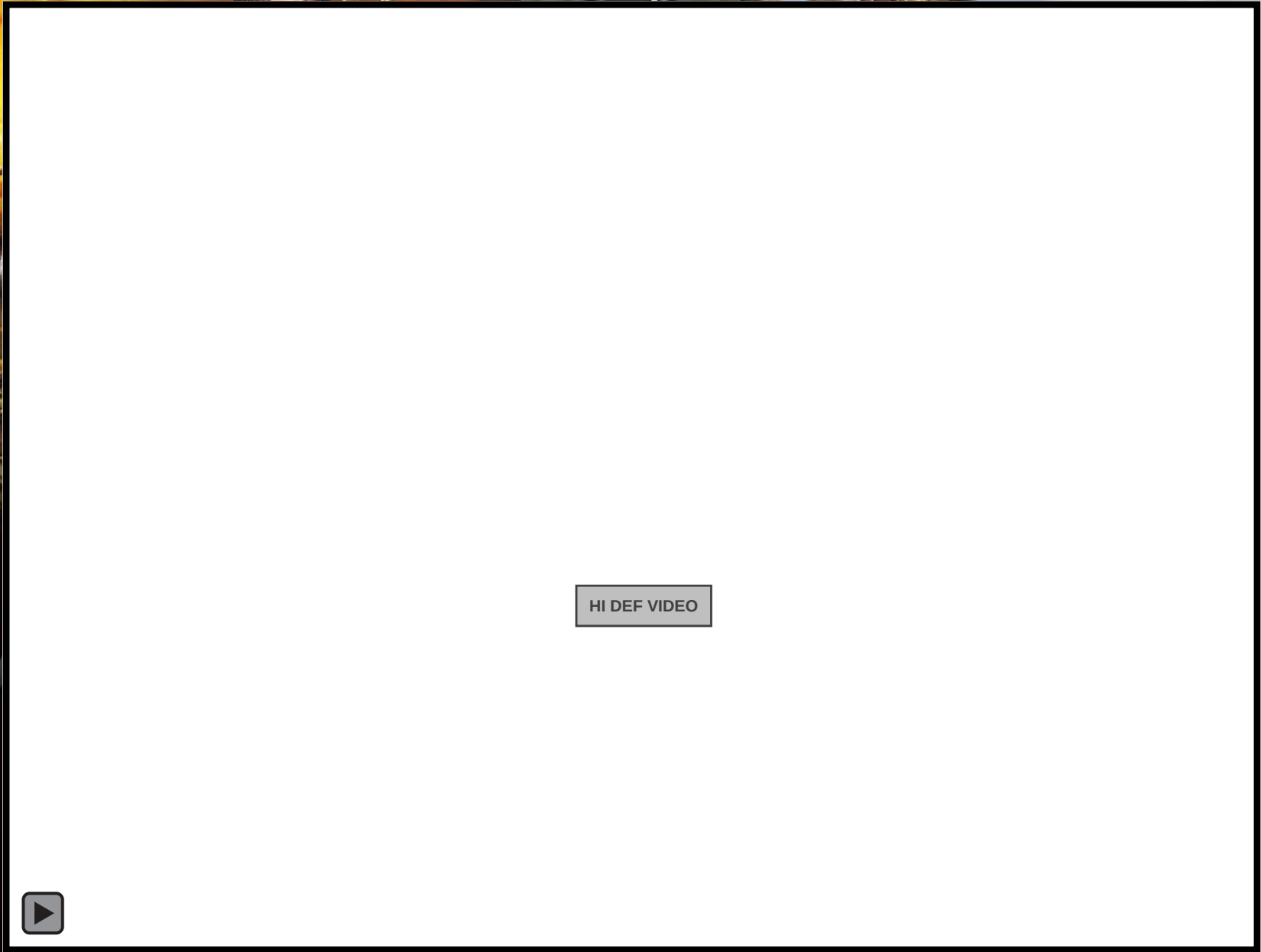
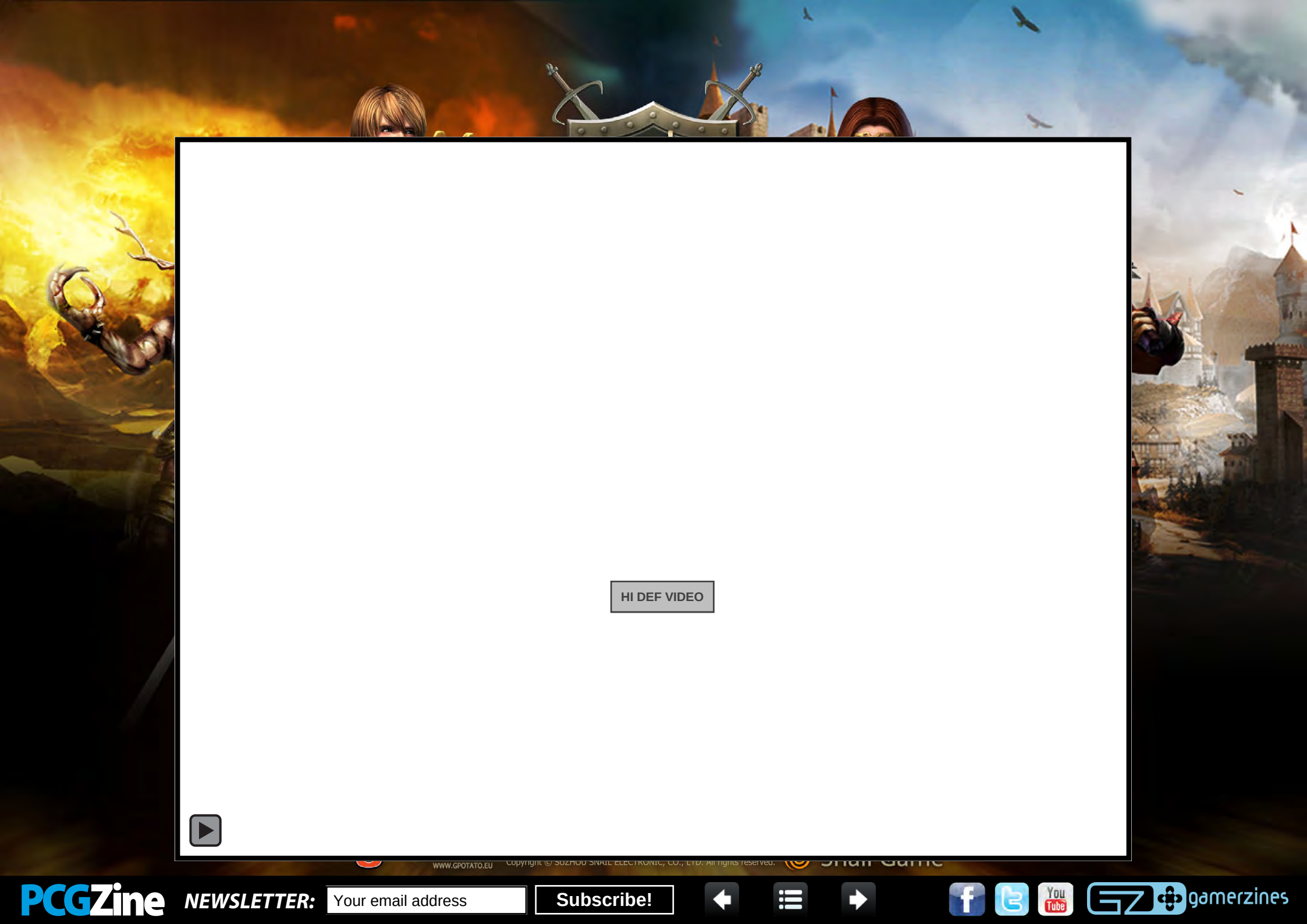
Don't just look at it, plant the bloody thing!



Just like in *Team Fortress 2*, whenever you're killed you have the option to capture a stylish screenshot of your murderer.



ZOOM



HI DEF VIDEO



SHOOTMANIA STORM HANDS-ON

Gunning for the competitive shooter throne

If any developer wants to test the waters regarding their latest attempt to penetrate the jam-packed competitive shooter genre, there's only one place to go: Dreamhack. The world's largest LAN festival is a hotbed of gamers who are obsessed with *Counter-Strike*, *Battlefield* and of course the almighty *Quake*. No wonder then that Nadeo stole the show this year with their fast-paced Rocket Arena-inspired *ShootMania*. Winning lots of plaudits for its fast-paced two-shot-kill gameplay, which is less of a game and more of a platform in its own right.

On the evening before the show kicked off, we were given exclusive online access to *ShootMania's* Alpha build, and even though there's still plenty of components of the 'Nadeo' experience missing, there was still plenty on display to get very excited about.

Much like *Quake 3: Arena*, the base gameplay is really simple. Every player is armed with a morphing

weapon grafted to their arm which can fire several volleys of laser projectiles. Hit an enemy player with a projectile twice and they vaporise. Simple right? Well it would be, but your weapon has to recharge its shots whenever fired, so battles transform into an absurd death ballet, with competitors seeking to avoid each other's fire while trying to plant their own. Now extrapolate that delicate twitch-centric interplay to 16 players on maps centred around a capture point, which when activated shrinks the playing area with an expanding electrical storm, and you have a deathmatch experience which is relentlessly fast-paced and incredibly exciting from moment-to-moment.

Like *TrackMania*, *ShootMania's* vanilla gameplay flavour has already been greatly expanded upon via lots of new maps and game modes – even though the game isn't even out of Alpha yet. Location-specific weaponry, like Lightning guns and sticky grenade launchers, are already mixing up traditional team



PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: NADEO
LAST GAME:
TRACKMANIA 2 CANYON
ETA: WINTER 2012

TWITTER



@joona.leppanen
#ShootMania looks like fun as an old Quake-geek. I heard theres betakeys out, where's mine?



@phakzmachine
I want to play @ShootMania so bad! Beta come faster!



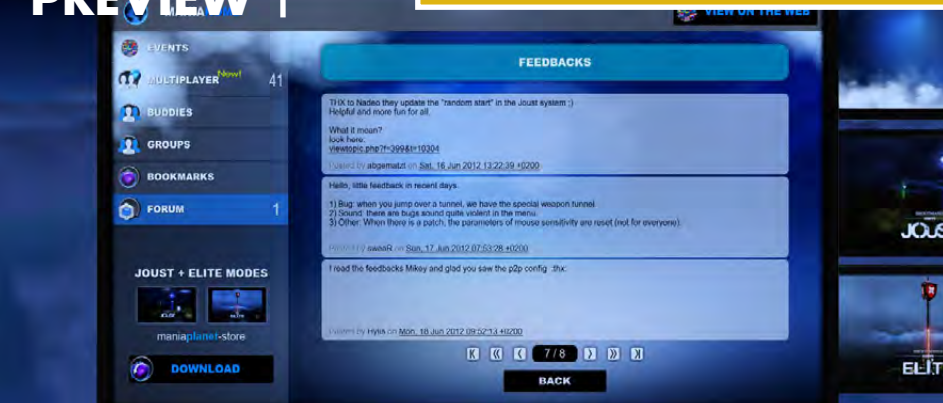
@imosse
I hope the final @ShootMania will have bots for practicing extremely rusted FPS-skillz.



@shootmania
You just need to create a funny picture about ShootMania to win a key! :p

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

ManiaPlanet now feels much more like a separate platform with its own interface and in-game store.



When killed your body transforms into a ghostly image before disappearing altogether.



domination and Free-For-All match-types and that kind of variety is only set to grow thanks to the new ManiaPlanet framework.

This new platform pools both *ShootMania* and *TrackMania* fans into one area, allowing them to visit their own forums, bet on forthcoming competitive matches using the

“ManiaPlanet places as much emphasis on player-made expansions as it does Nadeo’s”

ubiquitous Planet currency and of course access their game of choice.

Interestingly enough, ManiaPlanet places as much emphasis on player-made expansions as it does Nadeo's, which gives you an idea of how far the French developer wants to push this platform to unexplored areas. With that additional functionality there's still the same maddening level of statistical pondering, with players able to see where they rank in the world, their continent, their

country and even their local region. The potential of ManiaPlanet 2.0 is stunning and it should bridge the substantial gap between high-level competitive play and casual gamers – something that no e-sport game has done before, at least not to this impressive extent.

Unfortunately replay and map editors haven't experienced a similar transformation, with both still coming across as too obtuse. In the Alpha build they've been lifted wholesale from *TrackMania 2*, even still referring to combatants as cars. We sincerely hope Nadeo have enough time to overhaul both of these features, as *ShootMania* has the potential to be a real game changer for the industry.

ShootMania is an example of what can happen when a developer embraces their community and offers them a chance to create their own experiences and share them with others for free, rather than just pumping out unimaginative DLC and fleeing fans. In 2012 that's a lesson more developers and publishers should take note of. So no pressure then, Nadeo... ■



Nadeo's map editor is still incredibly powerful and now features a script editor for creative types to really go nuts!



SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Damned if you do and damned if you don't



PUB: 2K GAMES
DEV: YAGER DEVELOPMENT,
DARKSIDE GAME STUDIOS
LAST GAME: N/A
RRP: £34.99
ETA: OUT NOW

Never judge a book by its cover or a shooter by its dull military façade. On face value, the latest *Spec Ops* is yet another uninspired entry in the long history of run and gunners which pitches the protagonist as some kind of all American hero, despite his need to kill hundreds of enemy soldiers on the way to achieving his goal, but scratch underneath that smooth exterior and you'll find a coarse experience which shirks precedent to deliver an incredibly ballsy and genuinely disturbing campaign.

You play Captain Walker, the leader of a three-man Delta Force squad who have been sent into Dubai after a devastating sandstorm, in order to investigate what's left of the city, its inhabitants and a 2,000-man US Army

rescue force after months of forced isolation. The premise sounds hokey, but right from the start the campaign doesn't explain too much to the player, teasing them with small factual morsels on what may or may not have happened as sand blew into town, and how the occupying American force soon turns against the population it was meant to protect.

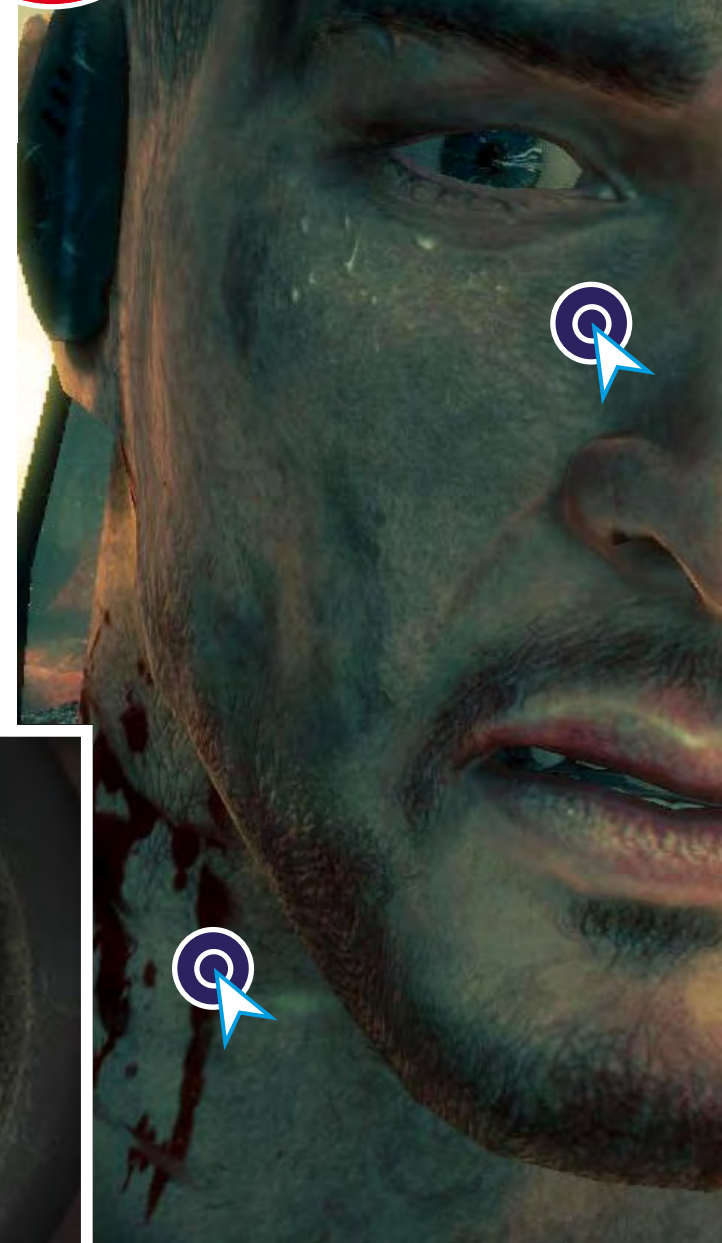
Simply put, the less known about this intriguing plot the better time you'll have with *Spec Ops*, but rest assured, this isn't a game for the squeamish. The adult-only rating is very much deserved, as you'll be faced with grisly scenes and some very unsettling and vivid imagery during the campaign, but these scenarios aren't just there for shock

value. They tie into some very thought-provoking themes surrounding problems of using martial law to control a civilian population, especially when both parties don't share the same culture, and how battles can quickly devolve into chaos when bullets are involved.

Unfortunately that sentiment is downplayed by the dialogue, with characters peppering sentences with F-bombs like they're going out of fashion and the same 'Hoorah' tone that can inevitably cause eye-rolls at times. Yet despite all that, both the star Walker and supporting protagonists Lugo and Adams help to ground the experience, constantly questioning player decisions.



The Line doesn't shy away from showing you the gory details.





Different classes of enemies, like this quick-dashing CQC specialist, do their part to mix up the cover-based combat.



The fact that we've focused this much on the plot should speak volumes about how different *The Line* is to the litany of other third-person shooters out there, but the truth is it's by far the most interesting aspect about it. The rest of the game feels a bit generic and features the same kind of gameplay you'd expect from a cover-based shooter.

There is some light squad management involved, with players able to order their pals to focus on certain targets, and chuck out flashbangs, but for the most part you'll just be taking cover, popping up to take a few shots, run to the next room... rinse repeat. However the guns on offer pack a lot of grunt, with a great deal of options available, including two different variants of AK-47, handguns, sniper rifles, machine guns and the ever-

reliable P-90 machine gun. There are a few gimmicks chucked in, like shooting out windows to cascade tonnes of sand onto unknowing enemies, a really brutal looking melee system and special Kevlar-clad enemies, but really that's about it.

"This is an experience which tries to pull the rug out from under your sceptical feet"

Multiplayer on the other hand is a bit more interesting, with plenty of game options shifting up the core four-versus-four gameplay, and a familiar progressive experience-based unlock system which leads to new guns, perks and visual options being unlocked as you progress through the levelling curve.

Again there's really nothing

spectacular here about how the competitive side of things is implemented, but it at least offers some additional hours of enjoyment after the rather short six-hour campaign has run its course.

Spec Ops: The Line is one of those shooters which is easy to dismiss at first glance, but if you give it a shot you'll be pleased to discover an experience which does all it can to pull the rug out from under your sceptical feet. Its core gameplay was never going to change the world, but the campaign's plot does more than enough to separate itself from the competition, and boasts several moments which will stick with you long after you've uninstalled the client. Certainly an experience which isn't to be underestimated. ■



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Play Trailer

FINAL VERDICT

A darker than dark shooter which is brave and thought-provoking

85



One of the most interesting shooter stories ever told



Gameplay isn't anywhere as near as ambitious as the plot



MAX PAYNE 3

The perfect remedy for your modern shooter ills...



PUB: ROCKSTAR STUDIOS
DEV: ROCKSTAR GAMES
LAST GAME: L.A. NOIRE
RRP: £29.99
ETA: OUT NOW

Rockstar don't do things by halves. They've put their heart and soul into every game they've produced over the past decade, be it *GTA IV* or *Table Tennis*, and *Max Payne 3* absolutely sums up that work ethic and dedication. After snapping up the rights to gaming's unluckiest cop, it would have been easy for the collection of studios that worked on this third game in the series to merely pump out a quick 10-hour campaign. Closely following the beats cleverly put together by Remedy back in 2001, instead *Max Payne 3* updates, emulates and adds to this series' iconic third-person shooter gameplay with a new multiplayer component, a relentlessly gritty atmosphere and production values that are frankly off the charts.

The campaign picks up with the titular hero rescued from the gutter by his one-time academy friend Raul Passos, who approaches Max with a job offer to protect a rich and powerful family in Brazil. Predictably enough, their straightforward duties go awry faster than you can say 'Mona Sax', leading to the duo being embroiled in a kidnap plot involving slum gangs, mysterious mercenaries and plenty of John Woo-inspired set-pieces involving speedboats jumping off ramps, people hanging from helicopters and shooting missiles out of the sky with Max's trusty arsenal of pistols, rifles and automatic weaponry.

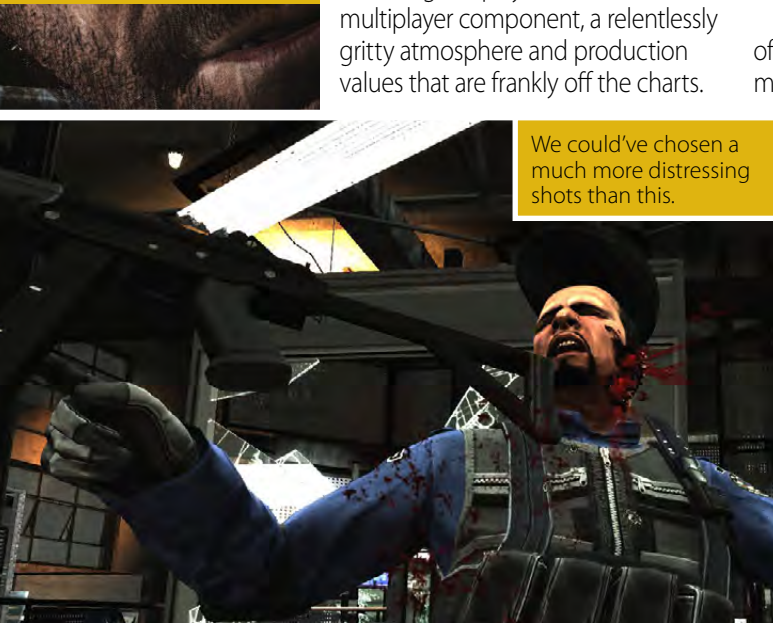
Strangely, despite the regularity of these Hollywood 'machismo' moments, *Max Payne 3*'s campaign

never feels anything less than gritty, immersive and at times unashamedly violent, with characters which seem perfectly happy to carry out acts of callous cruelty against their fellow man.

Remedy always knew how to draw the line under these events with comedic moments to alleviate tension, usually involving slapstick 'gweedos', bizarre TV shows like 'Address Unknown' and our personal favourite 'Captain Baseball Bat Boy', but in this campaign there's none of that. Instead, the atmosphere Rockstar has created draws you into Max's plight and never lets you go, with cut-scenes that disguise load times brilliantly and a sterling soundtrack which is more than a



Max Payne 3 looks absolutely stunning, and there are plenty of graphics options to tweak.



We could've chosen a much more distressing shots than this.



Diving in slow-mo while killing cowering enemies is still just as fun after all these years.





Dan Houser's fingerprints are all over the plot, with multiple characters seeming as though they've been ripped straight out of *GTA*.



ZOOM

little inspired by *Drive*'s sterling score. As a result the atmosphere is much more consistent and engrossing, with Max's passion for grandiose monologues also returning to full effect, with references to everything from the sanctity of mixing pain killers and alcohol to the problems associated with the growing poverty gap between rich and poor. There were times when we just had to stop

playing, not because we weren't having fun dispatching armies of gangbangers before an inevitable cut-scene faded in, but because we couldn't take the foreboding atmosphere any more. For any game to maintain its oppressive tone for the entirety of a 12-hour campaign is really impressive and, surprisingly, the repetitious gun battles, which make up the majority of the gameplay, don't dilute that tension. The reason for this is simple: *Max Payne 3* is a bloody hard game!

Unlike most modern releases, player health doesn't regenerate over time, as Max is required to pick-up and ingest painkillers in order to numb his wounds and, even on medium difficulty, players can die after only a few enemy bullets to their fleshy core. Thankfully this game's anti-hero hasn't lost any of his agility or time-slowness skills, even though he's getting on in years, and Rockstar has added a new cover mechanic which gives players time to survey the scene and let off some blind-fire before diving out of safety

and unloading a barrage of bullets into enemy skulls. Adding a cover system is a massive game changer, but it allows much more varied and imaginative enemy configurations and environments to be flung at the player. As a result the game can be

"Adding a cover system is a massive game changer"

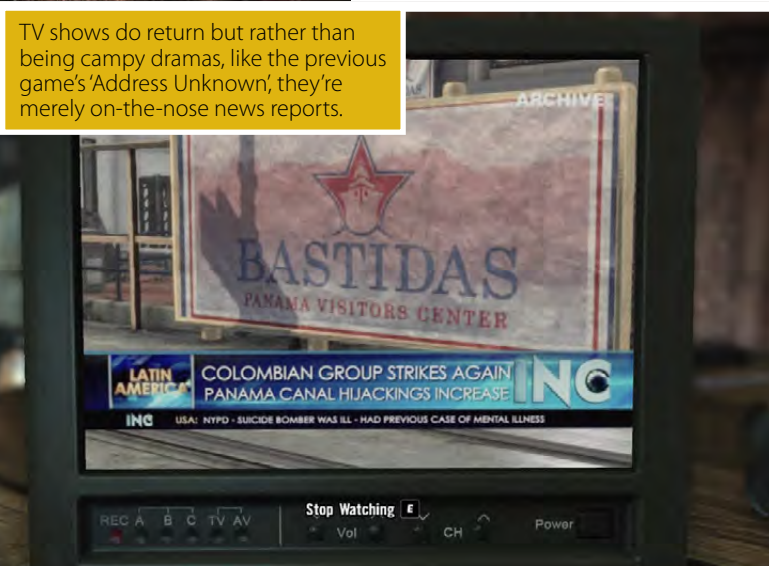
difficult and the sometimes lacklustre placement of checkpoints can exacerbate player frustration, but overall the campaign rarely dips below excellent with enough twists and turns to vary up the repetitive shooter gameplay.

When you're done with the campaign there's a considerably hefty multiplayer component, with maps supporting

up to 16 players and, most surprising of all, a localised Bullet Time system that works in a very similar manner to the offline campaign. This competitive gameplay potential mixed with different loadouts and weapon configurations should, in theory at least, keep you entertained long after the credits have rolled.

Max Payne 3 is undoubtedly a Rockstar game and it has lost a bit of that Remedy appeal. However, in the place of those campy elements is even more grit, grime and fantastic gameplay which only left us crying out for more Bullet Time fun. Mr Payne returns slightly murkier and bloodier than we remember, but like a fine wine his charms certainly haven't faded with time. ■

TV shows do return but rather than being campy dramas, like the previous game's 'Address Unknown', they're merely on-the-nose news reports.



FINAL VERDICT

Max is back and arguably even better than ever

93

- ⊕ Fast-paced plot with plenty of pay-off
- ⊕ Surprisingly bulky multiplayer component

SBK GENERATIONS

The end of an era



PUB: BLACK BEAN GAMES
DEV: MILESTONE
LAST GAME: MUD
RRP: £29.99
ETA: OUT NOW

If car racing is the sport of men then bike racing is undoubtedly the sport of gods. Think about it... there's no chassis protection for riders, who lean into corners often with their knees hovering inches from the ground, and their machines regularly clock near to 200mph.

It's no wonder that MotoGP has been increasing in popularity over the years, but *SBK Generations* unsurprisingly ignores that 'other' racing championship, instead chronicling the past four seasons of the Superbike World Championship with legendary riders like Carl Fogarty thrown in for good measure. In total the license equates to 17 tracks, 60 bikes and a mind-blowing 220 riders. In raw content terms, *SBK Generations* puts most other sport titles to shame,

but all that loving attention-to-detail would be for nothing if the on-track action wasn't any good.

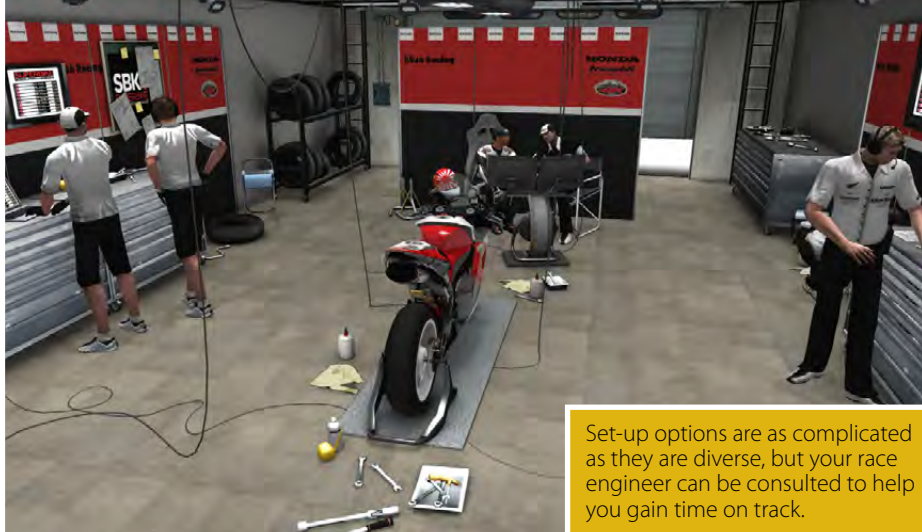
Milestone have been producing games utilising the SBK license for several years now, and it's no doubt been a fairly rough ride for them as, frankly, some efforts haven't been up to standard. At times the handling felt wrong, the visuals bland and the presentation lagged far behind that of other licensed racers, like Codemasters' *F1 2011*.

Generations is a considerable step-up from the previous year's attempts though, with three different handling models once again featuring, ranging from casual to hardcore, and wide-ranging AI settings so that even newbies to this motorsport will be able to find a

level they're comfortable with, and the same goes for seasoned veterans. There are many more options than there were previously, with all HUD elements now able to be switched off entirely, and there's plenty of racing aids available to enable a more approachable experience.

The camera modes too are numerous and affective, ranging from a handy over-the-shoulder view to two different helmet cams which are so immersive that it's almost impossible not to move your body in time with your rider as he leans into corners. When you select the 'Full Realism' option, the handling model feels exactly as it should with the bike nervously twitching when over-breaking or





squirming when the accelerator is pressed too quickly, and any venture off-track usually ends in your rider being thrown from his vehicle. We can't comment on how realistic the handling model is, but we will say that it requires plenty of skill.

Unfortunately the AI isn't quite so convincing with a similar 'follow the leader' style of racing that was shown in previous games. Computer riders just feel like they're on rails, with mistakes rarely scuppering their chances. This is a real shame, as it leads races to feel stale and causes the player to take more risks as they know the guy in-front isn't going to put a wheel wrong. This leads to you bumping wheels, muscling into apexes which again breaks the immersion, as your bike can often absorb quite a lot of contact before causing a wobble.

While the AI may let this game down, there's still plenty of content to sift through. There's the career mode which involves players creating a rider and guiding them through different classes and seasons from 2009 to the modern day, as well as lots of 'SBK Experience' events. This involves

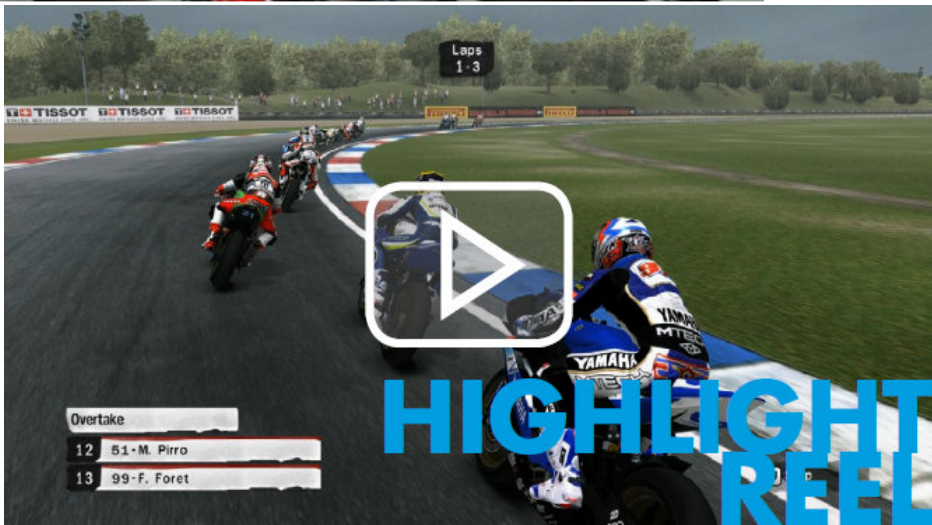
"SBK Generations is still a love letter to the Superbike Championship"

one-on-one races, time trials, different weather events and other activities which make a good tutorial to the FIM Superbike discipline.

Despite the appeal of the highly authentic career mode, we actually had the most amount of fun in this mode, as the short and varied nature of the challenges made

the most of what makes *SBK Generations* enjoyable, like the engaging handling model and competing against legendary riders. On the periphery there are also some nifty features like a new highlight-specific replay mode which shows you all the action worth watching from a race, on-track marshals and podium ceremonies which help to sell the game's authenticity that bit more.

Regardless of its few flaws, *SBK Generations* is still a love letter to the Superbike Championship and undoubtedly the best iteration in the series. It's a shame Milestone won't be working with the license any more, but they can move onto pastures new with their heads held high. ■



FINAL VERDICT

The best iteration of SBK to date, but still flawed in key areas

74

- ⊕ Four seasons worth of licensed data to play with
- ⊖ The AI is distinctly lacking in the competition stakes

QUANTUM CONUNDRUM

A puzzler where brains will only get you so far



PUB: SQUARE-ENIX
DEV: AIRTIGHT GAMES
LAST GAME: DARK VOID
RRP: £9.99
ETA: OUT NOW

As the first game from one of the key creative minds behind *Portal*, Kim Swift, it's easy to see why a substantial number of PC gamers are immensely excited by the prospect of *Quantum Conundrum*. Like Valve's iconic series, this budget release has a quirky comedic wrapper to make the inevitable brainteasing a bit less intimidating, and a piece of hardware which allows players to fundamentally shift time and space.

This is a familiar formula, but it's the nature of QC's puzzles which set it apart. The game begins with the player cast as a young nephew of an eccentric inventor. Armed with a special cross-dimensional glove which

can instantly transform reality into four different dimensions, you have to free the charismatic uncle – voiced by John De Lancie – by reactivating his dormant lab and venturing to the odd dimension he's lost in.

It's the kind of premise you wouldn't bet against Pixar making a movie about at some point, but unfortunately the plot is merely just a wafer thin façade to link different challenges together and chuck in some comical narration as the player ventures from one room to the next. This is only a slight misstep, but after a fascinating opening where you come across exotic inventions, meet a teleporting inter-dimensional

being, and gaze upon humorous paintings, the premise doesn't really progress

Thankfully the puzzles in QC are consistently excellent with solutions that most rational minds can get to the bottom of. Each of the magical multi-dimensional glove's different modes



unlock in a sequential manner, so you get a grip of what they can do in a very methodical fashion. First up there's the ability to switch to the fluffy dimension, which allows players to pick up a safe as if it was a feather, the heavy dimension which gives

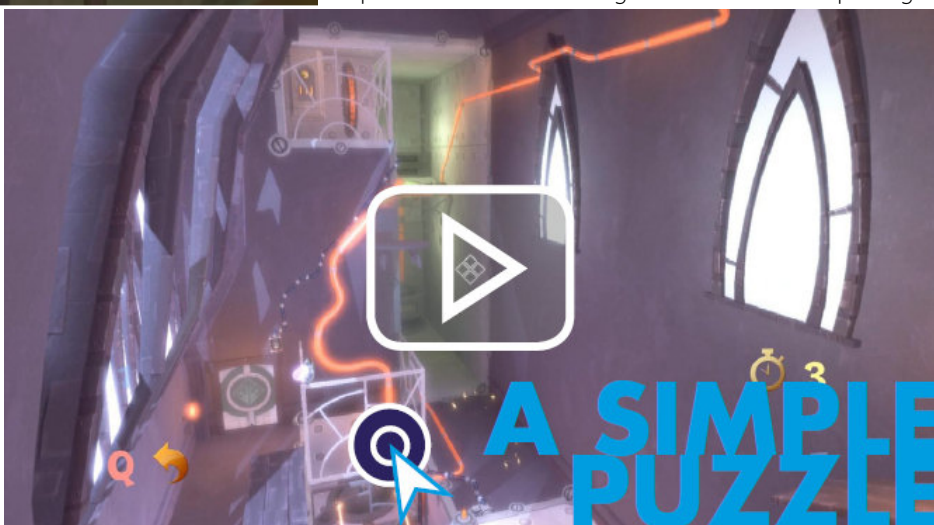
"Thankfully the puzzles in QC are consistently excellent"

unexciting cardboard boxes the same weight as a cube of a freshly compressed car. Then there's the slow-mo dimension which allows players to run around the world at a regular speed while the rest of environment is stuck in Bullet Time. Finally there's anti-gravity which causes objects to shoot towards the cosmos. With your handy dandy arm

contraption you can switch between these modes at will – to neutralise lasers, trip weight-sensitive switches and travel across giant ravines.

In addition to thinking your way around challenges there's also a lot of pixel-perfect platforming to be done, which due to the first-person perspective can feel clunky. Thankfully though you won't have to wait long if you make a mistake, with each puzzle boasting multiple checkpoints and near-instant reloading.

With a slender asking price and a campaign which if anything has too much content, there isn't a lot to complain about regarding *Quantum Conundrum*. It won't keep you busy for weeks on end, but it does offer a dozen or so hours of quality puzzle action. ■



A SIMPLE PUZZLE

FINAL VERDICT

A polished puzzle experience which isn't perhaps all it could be

78

- ⊕ The inter-dimensional glove and its puzzle potential are fantastic
- ⊖ The great story premise isn't as explored as it should be

KRATER

Can this dungeon crawler make an impact post-Diablo III?



PUB: FATSHARK
DEV: IN-HOUSE
LAST GAME: HAMILTON'S
GREAT ADVENTURE
RRP: £11.99
ETA: OUT NOW

Enjoyment is governed by expectation. This unwritten rule means sometimes those big triple-A releases aren't as enjoyable as those delightful 'indie' games which take you by surprise. It's an interesting phenomenon and one which is very apt for *Krater*, as it can, inevitably, be compared with fellow dungeon-crawler, *Diablo III*.

Yet despite coming out within weeks of each other, really these two releases are quite different. Sure they both belong under the umbrella term 'Dungeon Crawler', but while Blizzard's creation features a more traditional level-up structure focused on one-character, *Krater* sees you switching out members of your team of three

regularly, as you seek to meet the challenges posed by a post-apocalyptic version of Sweden. Rather than having a dark fantasy tone, *Krater* has an atmosphere which is somewhere between *Fallout* and *Borderlands*, with lots of kooky characters, a stunning soundtrack and one-liners that have been ripped from Hollywood blockbusters to give the game some colour.

The tone works really well and is supported by an open-world full to the brim with quests involving players hunting down mutated creatures, talking with mask-clad crazies and venturing into underground and overground facilities. The hard elements of producing a fun

atmosphere are carried out with great vigour – the only problem is that *Krater's* combat isn't terribly interesting.

Rather than controlling just one character at a time, you control a team of three which can vary from Healer, Shooter, Tank and Rogue classes. Each character only has two skills, which can be heavily modified and upgraded via skill allocated boosters and

implants. As a result, no character is all-powerful outright, with more of an emphasis placed on how your team supports one another. This challenge, albeit an interesting one, is really hard to get to grips with at the start as you struggle to heal, attack and support

"An atmosphere which is somewhere between Fallout and Borderlands"

simultaneously while the game doesn't allow any pausing of gameplay to think of your next attack. The stress associated with battling harder foes makes battles exciting and tense, but inevitably seeing your force get entirely wiped out is a regular occurrence. This combat model feels more in tune with online co-op.

After the first five hours, the

challenge goes from being manageable to incredibly frustrating as you come across groups of enemies with Healers, absurdly powerful melee attacks and bosses which make your level 15 squad come across as rather weak indeed. This difficulty curve is made even more daunting by the addition of permadeath and persistent injuries for characters repeatedly felled.

There's no doubt that *Krater* is a difficult game and that's intentional by Fatshark. That said, it certainly is a polished experience and has more than enough personality to exist in an immensely competitive and imaginative genre. Crucially Fatshark will be regularly adding to *Krater*, so expect it to get better and better as the months progress. ■



The open-world actively encourages exploration, but the levelled sectors can soon put your team back in their rightful place.

FINAL VERDICT

A hard as nails experience which while fun, isn't for everyone

78

- ➕ Great production values give *Krater* a great personality
- ➖ The difficulty curve soon becomes unmanageable

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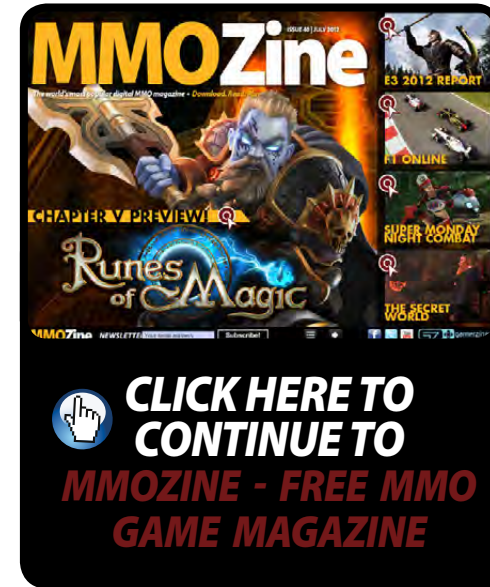
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